Philosophy Through Film: Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*

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Introduction

Through our experiences we have found that many people regard philosophy as an abstruse inaccessible subject. Even those with an interest in philosophy often assume that doing philosophy involves only or at least primarily reading dry, difficult texts.

Objective

Beyond debunking some myths about ways to engage in philosophy our primary goal is to make a genuinely philosophical film. We plan to use the resources of cinema to engage in philosophical reflection.

Characteristics of the Apollonian & Dionysian

Apollonian	Dionysian
structure	chaos
self-control	intoxication
plastic arts	nature
individuality	wholeness
beauty	destruction
peotry	excess
perfection	impulsive

Method

~In order to obtain our primary goal of making a genuinely philosophical film we chose to explore Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. We also drew on themes from Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. After much discussion and further research we created the personalities of our three main characters and developed a story from there.
~Based off our character and story outlines a screenplay was created in which the conflict between the Apollonian and Dionysian forces is dramatized.
~With the screenplay of our film *Kind of Blue* in hand production began on the filming and cinematic interpretation.
~Everything was tied together during the editing process.

Characters

Gus Ashburn

Name significance: **Thomas Mann's book Death in Venice was strongly influenced by Nietzsche. The main character Gustave Aschenbach begins as a strict Apollonian, but by the end he is swallowed by the Dionysian.**

Everything about Gus is very controlled and rigid. He is wholeheartedly an Apollonian man. In the jazz group the Dino Vintner Quartet he keeps the rhythm steady on the drums. Just after the film begins Gus is lost in an accident. Even though Gus never speaks or is seen in the film he has a very strong presence just like the metronome on his desk. Everything he walks away from is left in order. The structure and stability of Gus is a frequent topic in the film.




Freddy Silenus

Name significance: **In Greek mythology Silenus was the teacher and companion of the impulsive Dionysus.**

Whether or not Freddy is balanced between the Apollonian and the Dionysian is not the issue in this story. He is the metaphysically wise bartender at his very own jazz club. He mediates between the extremes of Gus and Dino. Shortly after the death of his friend Gus, Freddy recognizes that Gus providing a small amount of balance for Dino. With Gus out of the picture Freddy struggles to help Dino realise his way of life will eventually destroy him. Freddy's wise words and to-the-point attitude help Dino find his own way to a balanced way of life.




Dino Vintner

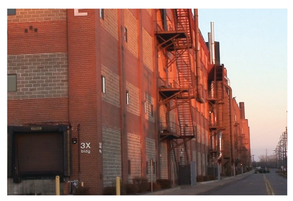
Name significance: **Dino is a direct reference to Dionysus the Greek god of wine and inspired madness. A vintner is a wine-maker.**

Dino has been on the brink of a downward spiral for years. The only thing holding him back was the Apollonian Gus. The Dionysian in Dino keeps him up to his eyeballs in liquor, smoke, and unintelligible jazz improvisation. He thinks life is all about doing things to the extreme. After Gus dies and the tempo of the Dino Vintner Quartet no longer keeps in time A friend, Freddy, takes Dino under his wing. Dino doesn't go very willingly, but eventually Freddy's wisdom breaks through Dino's rough exterior and Dino takes a step into the sun and into the balance between the Dionysian and the Apollonian.




Scenery

Not only did we try to emphasize Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics in the personality and actions of each character, but we attempted to have their surroundings reflect those same qualities. We spliced in images of urban settings in contrast to images of nature toward the beginning and later moved to images containing both. As our characters progressed so did our imagery.





Conclusion

Each of the characters we created displayed a key part of the Apollonian/Dionysian conflict. We clearly conveyed Nietzsche's theme. Seeing the relationships between the three main characters shows that a balance is needed. It doesn't work to be completely structured or all over the board. Not only were our philosophical themes displayed through the story, but the use of various angles, lighting, poses, moods, etc. were very successful. Each character brought something different to the screen. The feedback we have gotten throughout this process has encouraged us to realize our methods were successful.

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